

GHOST!

A SPOOKY WORD GAME



30 MIN.



2-∞



8+

Ghost! is a word game with a bit of a twist. Inspired by the classic parlour game Ghost, players take on the role of ghosts who are having a friendly wager: take turns spooking a victim, and the ghost who makes them pass out loses. In game terms, players take turns adding letters to words, all the while trying to *avoid* completing them!

SETUP

Each player shuffles their personal deck, then draws a card and randomly orients it between them and their neighbour to their left. Then, each player removes 3 random cards from their deck (without looking at them) and draws 7 cards to their hand. Place the 3P+ direction tracker clockwise-side up in the middle of the table, or the 2P direction tracker between the players in a 2P game. The game can now begin.

WORDS

Players share a word with each their neighbours, one on their left and one on their right. You already began a word when you randomly placed a card between you and your neighbour during setup. Words are always read left to right.

LETTER CARDS

Each card in this game features two letters, usually a common letter and a rare letter are paired together. Throughout the game, you will add letters to the two words that you share with your neighbours. Each card contributes only one letter to a word: when you add a card to a word, you must orient it such that the letter you wish to use is upright and at the top. The other letter is **completely ignored** for gameplay purposes. For visual clarity, you can use the cards removed from the deck to hide the unused letters at the bottom of the cards.

Note: in a 2-player game, the players share two words: each player still has one word to their left and one word to their right.

THE STACK

Your stack holds all the letter cards you have collected throughout the game. During the game, cards will be added to your stack from one of the two words you share with your neighbours. It is very important that you maintain the orientation of the letter cards when moving them from a word to your stack, because at the end of the game, only upright letters at the top of the letter card contribute to your score.

GAMEPLAY

Turns are simultaneous. Players alternate between taking an actions on the word to their left and to their right.

On your turn, you must perform *exactly one* of the following actions on this turn's word (the one indicated by the direction card, clockwise or anticlockwise):

- Play a letter card to **either end** of the word, and then draw a card from your deck.
- If the word is at least 4 letters long, your neighbour removes a letter from it and gives it to you: keep it face down in front of you as a *ghost card*. Then, **your neighbour adds the rest of the cards to their stack**. Draw the top card of your deck and randomly orient it between you and your neighbour in order to start a new word.
- Issue a challenge to your neighbour.

Once all challenges are resolved, flip the direction card and proceed to the next turn.

CHALLENGES

A player may issue a challenge if they believe that their neighbour has either:

- played a card that makes completing a word impossible
- completed a word.

The challenger must declare what type of challenge they wish to issue.

In the first case, the challenged player has a few seconds to declare a valid word that can be formed with the sequence of letters already there. If they fail to do so (or if they declare a misspelled/invalid word), they lose the challenge. If they do declare a valid word, the player who issued the challenge loses.

In the second case, the challenged player loses if the word is valid. Otherwise, the challenger loses.

The loser of the challenge must give a letter from their **stack** (or hand if their stack is empty) to the winner: the winner keeps it face down in front of them as a ghost card. The winner also adds **all** the letters of the word to their stack. Finally, the **challenger** draws a card from their deck and randomly orients it between themselves and the player they challenged in order to start a new word.

VALID WORDS

Only four-letter words or longer are valid. A player cannot be challenged for completing a 3-or-fewer-letter word.

Proper nouns, foreign words, technical jargon, initialisms, slang, etc. are also usually not valid. Players may agree to allow some of the above as valid words before the game starts. Players should also decide on a standardised dictionary for the purpose of resolving challenges. All inflected forms of valid words are valid. Both British and American spelling is allowed.

GHOST CARDS

Face-down cards in front of you are *ghost cards*. You may spend one ghost card (remove it from the game) *only* before adding a letter to a word. When you spend a ghost card, remove a letter anywhere from the word and add it to **your opponent's stack**. You may then place your letter normally at either end of the word, or in the place of the card you took. At the end of your turn, the word *cannot* be the same as it was at the start of your turn.

END OF THE GAME

When players' decks are empty (which will happen exactly after 20 turns), no new words are started, and players no longer take actions if there is no word between them. The game ends when there are no words between the players. Alternatively, the game ends immediately in the extraordinary case that players' hands are empty.

Green/yellow/red letters in your stack are worth 1/2/3 points. Unused Ghost cards are worth 1 point. Finally, the player with the highest score wins! In case of a tie, the player with the fewest letters wins. In case of a further tie, the players share the victory – but why not play another game of *Ghost!*

VARIANTS

For a quick or very quick game, remove 6 or 9 cards from players' decks. For a longer (and more strategic) game, do not remove any cards.

STRATEGY TIPS

It's good to have a general idea about where a given word is heading, but be prepared for your neighbour to force you to change your plans.

Be aware of what letters are left in both your and your neighbour's deck. You may not be able to play the letter that you want.

Sometimes, it's worth it to cut your losses and give up on a word before it gets too big if you think you won't be able to avoid completing it. The word will be worth fewer points to your neighbour, plus you'll get a ghost card.

Losing a challenge can be devastating: not only do you add the entire word to your opponent's stack, but your neighbour gets to remove a letter from your stack too. Try to only issue challenges you're certain you can win.

Ghost cards can turn the tide against your neighbour, even if they come with a small point bonus to your opponent.

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